

# A Modest Victory for Academic Values

## *The Demise of David Robinson*

*Paul Rodan*

*The rise and fall of David Robinson as Vice-Chancellor of Monash University was a parable for the times. In 2002, the man who defined managerialism in the Australian context seemed to be at the peak of his powers; a few months later he was gone in disgrace.*

*'It's a little secret, just a Robinson's affair' (Simon and Garfunkel, Mrs Robinson, 1967)*

In July 2002, David Robinson, Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, was, by most measures, at the peak of his power. Prematurely reappointed for a term which would last until 2006, Robinson presided over an educational empire with campuses on four continents. He had pursued an aggressive policy of restructuring, had introduced full fee-paying undergraduate places for domestic students and was largely surrounded by his own handpicked senior staff. Budgetary policy was neoliberal, and the numerically shrunken university council (following Kennett Government 'reforms') provided enthusiastic support for their Vice-Chancellor's leadership, despite staff and student reservations about his content and style: critics would later refer to an underlying climate of fear under Robinson. Yet, within two months, Robinson was gone in disgrace, brought down by a plagiarism scandal which achieved the unusual feat of projecting a university issue to the forefront of local and national media. This article explores the circumstances of Robinson's downfall in the context of continuing concerns about managerialism in higher education, the role of governing bodies and the place of academic values in universities. The dilemmas for the local NTEU branch are also examined.

A growing volume of literature attests to the managerial revolution within universities. While some is self-indulgently nostalgic, longing for a dubious golden era, a less tendentious critique sees institutions struggling in an age of declining funding and being forced in commercial and entrepreneurial directions which challenge the previous collegial culture. In this setting, so-called academic values are in regular tension with the emerging commercial and managerialist ethos: where conflict occurs, academic values usually lose. The most visible symbol of this change is the Vice-Chancellor, now styled as a chief executive officer and increasingly selected for a

record of managerial success as much as academic achievement. Consequently, the personality of the Vice-Chancellor and his or her leadership philosophy and relationship with senior management, become more critical.

Monash University was near the forefront of this trend before David Robinson took over as Vice-Chancellor in January 1997. Under the leadership of Mal Logan (1987-1996), Monash developed a reputation for (depending on one's taste) quantitatively obsessed expansion and self-promoting vulgarity, or politically shrewd repositioning and repackaging to ensure the institution a prominent place in higher education. Marginson summarises the development of a more powerful centre under Logan as follows:

The elements that now joined the Vice-Chancellor to the faculties were the executive group [Vice-Chancellor, deputy Vice-Chancellors, pro-Vice-Chancellors, registrar, general manager and occasionally others] and the reformed mechanisms of formula funding and financial management. The quasi-democratic collegial structures were maintained in form, but in practice largely superseded by management and executive power. The Committee of Deans and Professorial Board, later Academic Board, became consultative instead of decision-making forums (Marginson 2000, p. 167).

Moreover, Monash's transition to a diverse, multi-campus operation served to further enhance the power of the information-rich central leadership group.

It should be emphasised that while Logan attracted academic criticism over his successful pursuit of CAE partners, he had come to the job with a more than credible international academic reputation in his discipline of Geography (Marginson 2000, pp. 76-77). He was the Monash professor who

became a pro-Vice-Chancellor, briefly deputy Vice-Chancellor and then Vice-Chancellor, while Robinson was the professional academic manager whose recent record as Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Australia had equipped him for the Monash challenge (Marginson 2000, pp. 246-247). His academic background, in medical sociology, if not downplayed, was not emphasised at the time of his appointment. Given the internecine strife which had attended Logan's latter years, Robinson's external status was largely seen as a plus.

A summary of Robinson's record between January 1997 and July 2002 would focus on faculty restructuring with attendant staff cuts, economic rationalist budgeting, full fees for domestic students, intensive planning, international expansion and a 'hard right' industrial relations agenda. In style, Robinson combined an oleiferous superficial charm with a backstage vigour which supporters would defend as robust and forceful, but which critics would increasingly characterise as 'bullying'.<sup>1</sup>

During his first term, Robinson targeted the Arts and Science faculties for restructuring, focussing on alleged low enrolments in certain disciplines, a lack of high quality school-leaver demand and inadequate entrepreneurial and commercial activities. These criticisms could, to a large extent, have been made of most such faculties in most Australian universities, but such a response made no impact on a man determined to reshape Monash as a business-oriented institution in which all faculties conformed to the new model. Accordingly, student load was cut, voluntary redundancies were offered and accepted and ultimately, both faculties were substantially reshaped. If it is true, as Marginson suggests, that under Logan, faculties 'had a choice' and 'entrepreneurship was not made compulsory' (Marginson 2000, p. 166), that ceased to be the case under Robinson.

First in the firing line was Arts, where load was significantly reduced and the existing departmental system restructured into ten schools. In addition, the faculty was placed on a five-year financial plan with the threat of an administrator if fiscal rectitude could not be attained.<sup>2</sup> The incumbent Dean, Marian Quarty, having fought a vain balancing act between centre and faculty, saw no point in a futile application for a second term under a non-supportive Vice-Chancellor<sup>3</sup> and was replaced by the former Dean of Arts at Melbourne University, Homer Le Grand.

If nothing else, assaults on Arts faculties provoke fairly robust responses from an articulate sector of the academic workforce. Monash was no exception, with Robinson's policies attacked at staff and union meetings and by occasional brave academic souls in local media.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, Robinson rode these out, although when former Arts Dean and Emeritus Professor John Legge criticised Robinson at a staff meeting, the Vice-Chancellor responded by attempting to evict Legge from his university office. Outrage ensued, and Robinson's defence of his position (that Legge had 'abused'

Robinson's hospitality) failed to assuage critics who found the 'Vice-Chancellor as landlord' concept somewhat at odds with their less commercial view of the university.<sup>5</sup>

The University's Science faculty fared even worse. While its dean, Ron Davies, cooperated with Robinson on an initial program of cutbacks and voluntary redundancies, involving around seventy equivalent full time staff, he baulked at a second round in late 1999, contending that 'further cuts will mean that Science is no longer viable at Monash' (Maslen, 1999). Davies, the last of the deans to be appointed by Logan, made the mistake of robustly defending his faculty, rather than immediately implementing the consequences of the budget. The contemporary dean, at Monash and elsewhere, is now the champion of the vice-chancellor in the faculties rather than the champion of his/her faculty to the vice-chancellor. Hence, Davies' job was to 'sell' the budget to his faculty and implement the cost-cutting, not argue the detail with Robinson. Davies' resistance was a threat to the Vice-Chancellor's senior management philosophy and it was a mistake not made by other deans, whatever their private views. In passing, one might observe that budget formulae can be manipulated to achieve predetermined ends, rewarding supporters and punishing opponents.

In the course of their exchanges over the budget, Robinson and Davies' relationship broke down irreconcilably, a deadlock which could only be resolved one way. The meeting which led to Davies' resignation was a fiery one, with the Dean later going public describing Robinson as intimidating and abusive (*The Age*, 9 November 1999). The issue attracted unusual media interest, which included a story on ABC television's *7.30 Report*.

None of these actions endeared Robinson to staff, for what that was worth. The same was true of his introduction of a robust planning program for Monash, which involved glossy brochures, videos (featuring a talking head Robinson) and the full repertoire of market-speak. This vocabulary, and the associated grandiose claims, antagonised an academic community whose values were intrinsically hostile to clichés, exaggeration and unsubstantiated assertions. One academic was so annoyed that he pasted a copy of an associated learning and teaching planning document to his office floor, ensuring that every visitor had to walk over it. In power terms, the strong commitment to planning meant a narrowing of the agenda: views outside the 'plan' could be marginalised. Logan, by contrast, had been sceptical of detailed planning of the kind embraced by Robinson (Patience 1999/2000, p. 69).

On industrial relations, Robinson moved Monash further to the right of the spectrum, professing a preference for contingency-based pay rises and individual contracts. NTEU strength ensured that he achieved neither, but the industrial climate at Monash deteriorated during each of the Enterprise Bargaining periods of the Robinson years. Managers were expected to

make clear to staff that participation in industrial action was not a great career move.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, in setting the context for Robinson's fall, attention must be paid to the university council.<sup>7</sup> Robinson's first term coincided with the introduction of state government changes to the composition of Victorian university councils, the main features of which were an overall reduction in size, the abolition of elected graduate positions and an enhanced focus on business expertise amongst external members. (Rodan, 1999/2000) Thus, the council which presided over Monash affairs in mid-2002 was quite a different beast from that which had selected Robinson in 1996. Gone was the large elected non-professorial staff contingent (reduced from seven to two) along with elected graduates, whose gadfly members had taken seriously the notion of holding the senior management accountable. Not surprisingly, Robinson secured strong support for the directions in which he was taking the University, and staff and student member reservations were easily marginalised.

Symbolic of this change in council was the appointment of Jerry Ellis as the first non-lawyer Chancellor of Monash since 1968. Ellis had been both CEO and chairman of BHP, and while he had attracted considerable criticism within the corporate community, that failed to deter the Monash powers from installing him, sending the message that Monash was a business as much as a university, playing at the big end of town.<sup>8</sup>

Ellis took office in February 1999 and from the outset, chose to run the Monash council along the lines of a corporate board, with a preference for 'consensus' decision-making, which was often code for being able to present controversial decisions as unanimous, an issue of relevance later in this narrative. This was never a popular proposition with staff and student members who, both from conviction and out of deference to their electors, occasionally found themselves needing to express a view at odds with that of the management, and they resented being coerced into some phoney consensus. While Ellis could not be faulted as a chairman who allowed wide-ranging discussion, his failure to acknowledge the role of dissent in universities and the associated problematical nature of 'consensus' was a major deficiency, as was his extreme reluctance to allow formal votes, despite the provisions of the *Monash University Act*.<sup>9</sup> It was also apparent that Ellis subscribed to a 'back him or sack him' attitude to the Vice-Chancellor and this outlook was shared by his external council members, familiar with such a philosophy in business. The more collegial university attitude, embracing robust discus-

sion and occasional opposition to the Vice-Chancellor, seemed to attract no support.

Ellis' most controversial act was his recommendation to council that Robinson be reappointed for a second five year term, two and half years before the expiry of his first (a practice which would be almost unheard of in Ellis' business world). Although such premature re-engagements have become a little more common in universities, this was novel in August 1999. For staff opposed to Robinson, the premature reappointment was seen as outrageous, condemning them to

another seven and half years of misery. The official rationale, enunciated by Ellis and the Monash PR machine, was that Robinson was such an outstanding Vice-Chancellor that he would certainly be head-hunted by Monash rivals were he not 'locked in'.<sup>10</sup> The cynical interpretation was that Robinson had executed a very

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effective sales pitch to Ellis. A brave academic dissenter asked the council secretary, in vain, for evidence of Robinson's outstanding achievements, when they were alluded to in the media release announcing the reappointment.<sup>11</sup>

Under Logan, Monash had become a pace-setter in international education, with thousands of students, mostly from south-east Asia, recruited to the university. This emphasis continued under Robinson, but was complemented by the creation of Monash campuses overseas, specifically in Kuala Lumpur and Johannesburg. Moreover, 'branch offices', in Prato (Italy) and London were established, to promote the Monash brand name and help position the University as a genuinely international player. It was the London initiative which would ultimately help lead to Robinson's downfall.

While Robinson's policies attracted support from external council members and his most senior academic and administrative managers, his treatment of the Arts and Science faculties, and the perceived channelling of potential teaching and research funds into international adventurism and attendant PR had, predictably, ensured the enmity of many staff in the affected faculties, and of sympathetic staff beyond. His strong emphasis on planning was seen as excessive, attracting critics and cynics. Moreover, student activists, many from an Arts background, had mounted prolonged and colourful protests (including the erection of a 'tent city' outside the central administration building) against faculty restructures and the introduction of domestic full fee-paying undergraduate student places. The Monash branch executive of the NTEU, while constrained from all out war by industrial reality, had been at odds with Robinson over a range of matters and its members would not have counted themselves amongst the

Vice-Chancellor's supporters. While it is likely that Robinson enjoyed some support from staff in the asset-rich faculties of Business & Economics and Information Technology, academics from those areas are notoriously coy about public debate, rarely emerging to express public views about university controversies. In summary, if, in the event of a crisis, Robinson were to be in need of a reservoir of staff and student goodwill within Monash, he would be in difficulty. But, prior to July 2002, it is unlikely that he would ever have contemplated such a scenario.

On 21 June, *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (THES) carried a story that Robinson had 'admitted to plagiarism in the late 1980s' and that this 'had led some academics to question his suitability to head the Australian institution'. The article went on to detail two cases of alleged plagiarism, one involving a 1983 book and another from 1979. While Robinson had appar-

ently apologised for the former, the latter was described by the THES as a separate case. When contacted for the article, Robinson referred to 'these matters' being 'dealt with and resolved more than 20 years ago'. Significantly, he volunteered that the issue had been discussed with the Chancellor of the University of South Australia before his appointment there, but in an interesting distinction, added 'I was subsequently appointed Vice-Chancellor of Monash University largely on the basis of my performance at the University of South Australia'. The obvious inference was that Robinson had made no such revelations to anyone involved in the Monash appointment process in 1996. An equally plausible inference, given the story's origins in London, was that Monash's emerging profile there had drawn news of Robinson's exalted status to the attention of an ancient antagonist.<sup>12</sup>

Monash Chancellor, Jerry Ellis, was also contacted for comment, although whether he sought assurances from Robinson first is unknown. His support, however, was clear and unequivocal, citing the 'distinction and success' which had characterised Robinson's leadership and adding 'He enjoys my full support'. The THES story was picked up in Melbourne's *Sunday Age* of 23 June, although it was far from front page news. Significantly, the reporter described the story as coming at a 'bad time' for Monash, given the opening of the Monash University Centre in London, scheduled for the following month.

Coincidentally (one assumes), the Monash council was to meet the following evening. For Robinson, this offered opportunity and danger. If he could make a credible case to the governing body and secure its support, it was possible that the

matter could be buried before gathering any further momentum. Vice-Chancellors are not routinely suspected of serial plagiarism and assurances that Robinson's offences had been aberrant indiscretions would probably ensure an endorsement of his leadership and the marginalisation of more sceptical staff and student members.

Minutes of the meeting do not indicate whether Robinson did provide these assurances,<sup>13</sup> although the Monash media release indicated that Robinson advised members that he had admitted to, and apologised for, at the time in the UK, two inci-

idents. Evidence in relation to the second instance/apology was elusive, a point made by the President of the university lobby group, the Association for the Public University (APU) (*The Age*, 25 June 2002).

If these were the only two copying incidents in Robinson's career, then he was now home free: the Chancellor and council had accepted his explanation and, after lengthy dis-

cussion, expressed its support – although reference to a 'unanimous' endorsement was treated with scepticism by those familiar with Ellis' style of chairing. (Indeed, staff members on council felt obliged to advise staff that no vote had been taken and that vigorous and detailed discussion had occurred.<sup>14</sup>) However, if Robinson had plagiarised on other occasions, then he was totally reliant on such instances remaining uncovered, since the revelation of further offences would surely precipitate his downfall, not only for plagiarism, but for misleading council and the Chancellor.

There the matter rested for eight days. On 3 July, *The Australian* ran a story suggesting that one member of Robinson's Monash selection committee had been aware of his past sins, but had failed to alert other members. While there was natural speculation as to whether such knowledge would have affected the recommendation of the committee, or the decision of council, to appoint Robinson, the story added nothing to any case against him. Rather, it reflected on the selection process and the role of the 'headhunting' firm which had managed it. When a spokesperson for Cordner King Hever declined to comment on 'whether it was the job of a recruiter to inform a client of possible black marks against a prospect' (*The Australian*, 3 July 2002), cynics were left wondering what exactly was their job, given the volumes of public money such firms apparently pocket for their role.

In the normal course of events, the affair might have died there. New cases of plagiarism had not been proffered and the media were, understandably, losing interest in what could now easily be written off as a one-week wonder, not atypical

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of the curious behaviour of universities. Opponents of Robinson consoled themselves that he'd at least been embarrassed, but were resigned to the likelihood that the matter would go no further. Robinson himself was presumably growing in confidence that the crisis was over.

Such thinking took no account of the enmity that Robinson had aroused at Monash. Academic opponents, doubtful that these could be the only two cases of plagiarism in a CV which boasted dozens of publications, took to ploughing through whatever written works of Robinson's could be found: volumes which had gathered dust on library shelves were scrutinised with forensic detail and on 6 July, *The Age* carried the headline 'Plagiarism: fresh claims against Monash Uni head'. William Webster, an ex-Psychology academic at Monash who now held an honorary appointment, provided new evidence of plagiarism by Robinson: a 1976 book carried substantial unacknowledged sections from a volume published in 1972.

In reality, Webster was a 'front-man', the detective work having been undertaken by Philosophy Professor John Bigelow who opted to remain anonymous.<sup>15</sup> However, the following day, an Associate Professor in Engineering, David Suter, went public with a denunciation of Robinson, and it seemed that a critical moment had been reached (*The Sunday Age*, 7 July 2002). Attacks from student associations and the NTEU were no less vigorous for being predictable, but when an *Age* editorial (9 July) called for Robinson to explain, it was clear that the climate had changed rapidly and significantly.

Robinson's subsequent explanation, that he was under pressure to publish at the time (*The Australian*, 9 July 2002), attracted ridicule and hilarity from an academic community routinely coping with much more pressure than attended research-only positions in the UK in the 1970s. Ominously, in reporting Robinson's 'defence' to the Monash community, Ellis concluded his email as follows:

I am continuing to meet with people across the full spectrum of the university. I remain open to your commentary and will keep Council informed.<sup>16</sup>

It is understood that Ellis' invitation prompted a flurry of responses. Amongst the most acerbic was one from an associate professor whose comments included:

I know of no academic convention that a *post hoc* apology for plagiarism vitiates the offence. The convention is that you don't do it in the first place.<sup>17</sup>

From this point, it seemed that Robinson's fate was effectively sealed. In a burst of exuberance, the APU called for evidence of further plagiarism by Robinson or indeed any other vice-chancellor.<sup>18</sup> Letters to the editor were overwhelmingly critical and *The Australian* in an editorial (10 July) called for his resignation, as did the National Union of Students (*The Age*, 10 July). This exhortation was echoed by the Monash

branch of the NTEU (*The Age*, 11 July). A satirical publication, ridiculing Robinson and the Chancellor's inaction, hit the electronic airwaves from Monash.<sup>19</sup>

On 11 July, *The Australian* reported that Robinson had been directed by Ellis to fly home from London, where he had been due to open the Monash University Centre. Upon his return, and after discussion with Ellis, Robinson resigned, with allegations of a fourth case of plagiarism hanging in the background. In a statement to the media, Ellis said of Robinson:

He could see he was creating damage for the university. The only solution that he could see, and I could see, and we came to this together, was to leave. (*The Age*, 12 July 2002)

The reaction to Robinson's demise was predictable and does not warrant excessive detailing in this narrative. The Union and student association expressed satisfaction as did a range of staff, several registering outrage at a mooted payout to the departed Vice-Chancellor. Senior staff, including some deans, expressed regret at the loss of a talented and inspirational leader.<sup>20</sup> For this latter group, achievement as Vice-Chancellor mitigated prior indiscretions; for the former (who would not have conceded that Robinson 'achieved' anyway), plagiarism was not negotiable.

In analysing the fall of Robinson, an appropriate starting point is the role of council and the Chancellor. It is easy to be critical of their initial inaction, but the limited time between the original *THE* story and the council meeting tied their hands. If, as Robinson presumably assured them, his indiscretions had been limited to two, then dismissal was probably not a realistic option, although the university would have endured an ongoing credibility problem about its own plagiarism policies.

What was less excusable, after revelations of further plagiarism, was that the Robinson issue became more of a public relations problem than a scandal about academic standards. At no stage did Ellis or any Monash spokesperson make clear that serial plagiarism was unacceptable and for this reason (not PR damage) Robinson had to go. Indeed, the editorial writer of *The Australian* (10 July), amongst other observers, seemed to have a keener appreciation of the unacceptability of plagiarism than did the council of Monash University. A council member advised the author, confidentially, that most external members had seen Robinson's offences 'as no big deal'. This lends support to those who contend that modern governing bodies, restructured along corporate lines, are not as informed by, nor committed to, academic values as their communities would expect.

Equally concerning is the question of council's own dignity and self-respect. Having apparently been assured by Robinson that his plagiarism offences were limited to the initial two, council confronted subsequent revelations demonstrating that the reality was otherwise. Yet, nowhere was this cited as a

reason for the parting of the ways, suggesting a curious relationship between CEO and board. Certainly, a governing body which routinely prefers not to inform itself of senior executive remuneration details, appears to have a novel view of accountability. Almost predictably, council did not meet to discuss or approve the Robinson payout, this being left to Ellis.

In defence of the undisclosed payout, estimated at one million dollars (*The Australian*, 20 July 2002), it was asserted by Ellis that Robinson 'had fulfilled the terms of his contract and would not be penalised for his early departure' (*The Age*, 12 July 2002). The inference from such a statement is that no expectations of prior good reputation or behaviour can be assumed and that any such requirements should be explicitly stated. Apparently, future contracts should proscribe past plagiarism and (presumably) any other offences, academic and otherwise, which can be imagined. The academy has reached a sad state.

This aspect highlights problems of selection processes, an issue of concern beyond Monash. With wisdom after the event, it seems certain that the academic record of future applicants, including their publications, will be scrutinised in detail. If a headhunting firm is to be utilised (a far from self-evident proposition), it should at least earn its money by gathering the widest possible intelligence on candidates and providing it for the selection committee. For a time at least, academic credibility may loom as a criterion of equal importance to managerial ability. And, given their determination to act like businesses, universities might come up with selection processes which are a little more sophisticated than two interviews and three references.<sup>21</sup> As for committee members who fail to disclose relevant information, as alleged in the Robinson appointment, it must be conceded that we can't legislate for ethics.

The failure to reveal details of Robinson's payout leaves higher education as a last bastion of non-disclosure, but not one that seems to concern Brendan Nelson and his allies, normally obsessed with accountability and transparency in the domain of public expenditure. Public sector golden handshakes are routinely revealed and corporate termination payments are increasingly made public. No explanation as to why universities should be different has ever been offered. The media's loss of interest in the matter is revealed in the absence of subsequent FOI requests.

Finally, the Robinson affair throws light on the dilemmas facing NTEU branches in the area of governance. From its origins, the Monash branch had opted to endorse academic and general staff members for council positions and these candidates had invariably been elected. In the period under review, acting branch president, Dale Halstead, also served as the elected general staff member on council. This meant that Halstead was frequently sought out for media interviews as the plagiarism crisis deepened. While making clear she was speaking as a branch official, this distinction was always

bound to be problematical. Moreover, any blurring of roles was pounced on by certain anti-union council members, eager to criticise Halstead and to accuse her of conflict of interest and/or breaches of confidentiality.<sup>22</sup>

The period was an uncomfortable one for Halstead, who became so sensitive to the attacks made on her that she declined to avail herself of Ellis' offer for council members to view details of Robinson's separation payment, on condition that they maintained secrecy. Halstead was convinced that, in the event of any leaking of the information, she would be blamed.<sup>23</sup> It was unfortunate timing that Halstead held both union and council positions during this period, but while it might be tempting to argue that the roles should always be filled by different members, it seems impossible to generalise. Often, the one person is best for both roles.

Two positives can be taken from the saga. First, Robinson was brought down over an issue of academic propriety. It would appear that the university qua business must still pay obeisance to certain academic principles. The list of such values may be shorter than in times past, but the unacceptability of plagiarism is on the list. It is true that for council and senior managers, the issue became more one of PR, but it was a PR problem with academic origins. It is difficult to imagine the same outcome if past indiscretions of (say) a financial or sexual nature had been uncovered.

Secondly, the opinion of the university community, within Monash and beyond, counted. Concerned staff expressed their outrage, first at underground level and then more publicly and in so doing, contributed to the momentum which helped seal Robinson's fate. Robinson had antagonised many individuals and groups and while this is hardly unique CEO behaviour,<sup>24</sup> it meant that he had no staff goodwill to appeal to when his future was in the balance. Indeed, it went further than a lack of goodwill: he enjoyed outright hostility. After Robinson claimed to have offended only twice, alienated and disgruntled staff set about the task of discovering further cases and their role was crucial in demonstrating that a wider pattern of plagiarism was involved.<sup>25</sup>

The final word on the fall of David Robinson should go to Ron Davies, the Science Dean forced to leave Monash after his clash with the Vice-Chancellor. Coincidentally, Davies was returning from Canada to a university post in Australia at the same time Robinson was leaving Monash. Asked for his reaction to Robinson's loss of office over the plagiarism scandal, Davies commented, *inter alia*:

It just showed me that our professional differences were even wider and more profound than I had realised. (Maslen 2002) *a*

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## Endnotes

- 1 For views on Robinson's style, see *The Age*, 13 July 2002. When talking to what he perceived as a hostile audience, Robinson could tend towards the patronising. This writer witnessed an address to a faculty board, in which, alluding to likely budget cuts, Robinson advised that there would be 'tears before bedtime', a curious way in which to communicate to senior academics.
- 2 For council discussion on the Arts budget problems and restructuring, see Monash council meeting 6/98, 21 September 1998 at <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/unisec/com/> (Secretariat web site), pp vi-x.
- 3 Discussion with M Quartly, 24 September 2003.
- 4 For example, see P James, 'How Monash Gained the World and Lost its Soul', *The Age*, 11 August 1998 and Milner (2000).
- 5 See Ellingsen (1999) for an account of the Legge incident. For comment, see also Gaita (2000), pp 44-45.
- 6 See L Parrott (*Acting Manager, Performance and Training Development*, Monash University), 'Change: a Human Resources Perspective', presentation to 1997 Victorian state conference of the Australasian Institute of Tertiary Education Administrators. Amongst 'career limiting behaviour', Parrott listed 'Active involvement in a union'. It is difficult to conclude that Parrott was doing other than reflecting the Monash line.
- 7 Comments on the Monash council are based, in part, on the author's membership of that body, as an elected general staff member, from 1990 to 1997 and in 1999.
- 8 For critical reference to Ellis' BHP roles, see 'Ellis news lifts BHP's price', *Australian Financial Review*, 26 March 1999 and H Kelly 'Just who runs our universities' at <http://www.crikey.com.au/whistleblower/2002/07/07-vicechancellors.html> (7 July 2002)
- 9 See *Monash University Act*, section 20 (1).
- 10 Email from secretary to council to all Monash staff, 10 August 1999, author's papers.
- 11 Email from A Butfoy to secretary to council, 11 August 1999, author's papers.
- 12 An *Age* journalist attributed the origins of the *THES* story to 'two of Robinson's former colleagues at the University of Hull...', *The Age*, 13 July 2002.
- 13 See comment by student member of council that Robinson did give such an assurance, *The Age*, 25 July 2002.
- 14 Email from D Halstead to all NTEU [Monash] members, 5 July 2002, author's papers.
- 15 Discussion with W Webster, 21 October 2003. Bigelow 'outed' himself in an interview in *The Australian*, 13 July 2002.
- 16 Email from J Ellis to all Monash staff, 8 July 2002, author's papers.
- 17 Email from B Costar to J Ellis, 8 July 2002, author's papers.
- 18 Email from K Kregan, Secretary APU, to APU members, 5 July 2002, author's papers.
- 19 *Monash Gazette* (The unofficial Newsletter of Monash University), two issues, July 2002, author's papers.
- 20 For critical comment, see for example, D Suter (letters, *The Age*, 16 July 2002) and S Bastomsky (letters, *The Australian Higher Education Supplement*, 17 July 2002). For favourable comment by deans, see S

Willis (Education Faculty) in *The Australian*, 13 July 2002 and N Saunders (Medicine Faculty) in *The Age*, 13 July 2002. With Robinson gone, Halstead felt free to refer to 'a climate of fear' at Monash (*The Age*, 13 July 2002) and a Mathematics academic wrote 'It is a relief to be able to write this letter without fear of losing my job.' (R Mardling, letters, *The Age*, 16 July 2002).

21 Monash council's selection process for Robinson's long-term successor (an interim Vice-Chancellor, Peter Darvall, served for just over a year) was, naturally, more thorough than that which had produced Robinson, utilising specialist panels (including outside experts) to assist with the ultimate appointment of Richard Larkins.

22 Discussion with D Halstead, 7 November 2003. Halstead concedes that there may have been some genuine confusion about possible conflict of interest and differing interpretations of 'loyalty' among some members. She later sent a letter to the chancellor (22 August 2002), seeking to clarify her position, and this was noted (without comment) by council (copy held by author).

23 Discussion with D Halstead, 7 November 2003.

24 In styling themselves as CEOs, Vice-Chancellors may be identifying with a group increasingly seen as 'abnormal'. In an article dealing with some emerging findings on CEO characteristics and behaviour, Cornell (2003) claims 'The idea that there was some pathological basis to errant boss behaviour has gained prominence.' He cites Robert Hare, an expert on psychopaths, as identifying the person with 'charisma without conscience' as the most pernicious type. Hare is also quoted on the close connection between psychopaths and the 'traits we typically associate with leadership...' Without labouring the point, it seems likely that many in universities might recognise some familiar themes in these findings.

25 By the time of Robinson's departure, the Monash 'grapevine' had it that several more instances of plagiarism had been discovered. *The Australian* (13 July 2002) alleged that, in the period prior to the resignation, Ellis had asked a Monash academic 'to look into Professor Robinson's body of published work for any additional evidence.'

## References

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